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A RECAPITULATION OF -- STUDENT DROPOUTS IN THE DIVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA, SPRING SEMESTER, 1967.

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A HIGH DROPOUT RATE BETWEEN THE SPRING AND FALL SEMESTERS OF 1967 AT THE DIVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA, PROMPTED THIS STUDY TO DETERMINE THE REASONS FOR WITHDRAWAL. THE STUDY POPULATION WAS LIMITED TO ON CAMPUS SPRING SEMESTER ENROLLEES SEEKING UNIVERSITY CREDIT. A 16 QUESTION SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE WAS SENT TO 1,090 DROPOUTS, 304 OF WHOM RETURNED USABLE QUESTIONNAIRES. THE MAIN REASONS REPORTED FOR WITHDRAWAL WERE LACK OF DESIRED COURSES, TRANSFER TO DAY CLASSES, ACCOMPLISHMENT OF EDUCATIONAL GOALS, EMPLOYMENT INTERFERING WITH ENROLLMENT, AND MOVEMENT FROM THE COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, DESPITE USE OF A RANDOM SAMPLING TECHNIQUE, THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY WERE JUDGED INCONCLUSIVE BECAUSE OF AN INSUFFICIENT NUMBER OF RESPONSES. (CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FINDINGS CONCERNING THE POPULATION AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY WERE DISCUSSED.) (LY)

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A RECAPTITULATION OF:

STUDENT DROPOUTS IN THE DIVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA, SPRING SEMESTER, 1967

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

The University of Arizona has extended late afternoon and evening classes to adults in the greater Tucson area since 1959 when the Division of Continuing Education was established for the purpose of serving various adult education needs. Services of the Division include Summer Sessions, extensions classes held in population centers throughout the state, workshops, institutes and conferences, late afternoon and evening classes on the campus offering University credit, and non-credit adult evening classes. The Division of Continuing Education has experienced a steady growth of enrollments in all phases of its operation, yet little or no evaluation of the effectiveness of the total continuing education program has been undertaken.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At the close of the 1967 Fall registration at the University of Arizona it was learned that 1,090 Continuing Education students who had been enrolled in credit classes on campus in the 1967 Spring semester did not enroll for additional classes in the Fall semester. The 1,090 students represented 65% of an original Spring enrollment totaling 1,674 students, and thus it appeared that a dropout problem of sufficient magnitude existed to warrant some type of study. It was believed that such a study would be helpful in the analysis of reasons why students dropped out of Continuing Education and hopefully improvements could be made within the program to curb the rate of student dropout.

III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The Division of Continuing Education has not maintained student records of any kind, and very little information is available from the Office of Admissions which might be useful for purposes of evaluating adult dropouts. This being the case, adults who have not continued their enrollments in subsequent semesters have, for the most part, been undetected.

The fundamental need for studying the problem seems to be that of attracting and holding adult students until such time as they have fulfilled their education needs or goals. The application of research methodology to the problem of adult dropouts should produce data which could be helpful in ascertaining reasons underlying the problem, Steps could then be taken by the University to eliminate, change, or improve those factors which on the part of the University have contributed to the problem or established that "all is well".

IV. HYPOTHESES

Continuing education students involved in the study were enrolled in many different subjects, since nearly four hundred courses were offered in the continuing education program for Spring 1967. It can be assumed that most students were sufficiently motivated by various stimuli to select particular courses, pay tuition and fees, purchase books, and devote one or more evenings per week to class attendance. An unknown percent of the students did not complete the semester. Such action suggests a waste of time, effort and money on behalf of the particular dropouts. The remainder of those students who did not return for classes in the Fall Semester in-

dicate a possible diminishment of motivation or other pertinent reasons for their behavior. The hypotheses which follow have been constructed on the basis of those factors which might affect adult decisions or behavior related to dropout.

Students entered military service.

Students have satisfied their educational needs.

Classes were not offered at hours suitable to adult schedules.

Classes were not offered on suitable evenings.

The curricula did not provide adequate courses.

Students did not have sufficient financial resources to continue their education.

Employment interfered with student enrollment.

Students have moved to another community.

Students have transferred to day classes.

Family problems prevented students from continuing their education.

Students have experienced failure and do not wish to return to the University.

Health problems prevented students from continuing their education.

Students lacked transportation to the campus.

Students enrolled in another college or university.

Additional hypotheses related to University services such as parking, library, registration, book store hours, and student union have been considered as possible contributing factors to student dropout, but they were not considered to be of sufficient conswquence to encourage dropout. Such factors were revealed in the "other" category of the research instrument by those students who have strong feelings that university services did affect their attendence.

V. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Library research has been the medium for investigation of previous research related to the problem of continuing education student dropouts. A survey questionnaire was designed to ask each dropout the reason(s) why he or she did not enroll in the Division of Continuing Education in the Fall Semester of 1967 at the University of Arizona. All questionnaires returned by students were sorted, compiled, classified and analyzed in accordance with data received on each questionnaire.

VI. DELIMITATIONS

The population for the study was limited to those who were enrolled in the Spring Semester 1967 in continuing education classes on the campus for university credit. Such delimitation was necessary in view of the fact that the Divison of Continuing Education has several thousand adult students enrolled in its various programs.

VII. DEFINITIONS

The term dropout defined those students who, for reasons unknown, did not continue their education in a subsequent regular semester in the Division of Continuing Education. Broadly defined, continuing education students are adults who have been admitted to the University of Arizona through the Division of Continuing Education regardless of age, occupation, previous education or educational goals. All Continuing Education classes met at 4:40 p.m. or later in the evening for a full semester. Most classes met two evenings per week.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

I. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire contained 16 closed questions, each based on an established hypothesis. Adults were simply invited to check the particular reason(s) why they did not seek additional classes in the Fall Semester, 1967. Rank order of importance was requested of respondents who felt they had mo e than one reason for dropping out.

One open ended category entitled "other" enabled respondents to write in reasons for dropout not included in the 16 original questions. A' letter from the Director of Adult Education accompanied each questionnaire for the purpose of explaining why the study was undertaken.

II. PROCEDURE

Address labels were obtained from the Data Processing Center at the University of Arizona, and it was discovered that all but 20 addresses could be used for the study. Eight addresses listed were in foreign countries and 12 were incomplete. During the week of January 8, 1968, 1,070 questionnaires were mailed via second class mail. Each envelope contained a letter, questionnaire, return postage paid envelope, and a Spring 1968 Continuing Education Catalogue.

The deadline for return of questionnaires was established for January 25th. The sex of respondents was determined by sending color coded questionnaires: white for females, green for males.

III. PRESENTATION OF DATA

162 females have returned questionnaires.

142 males have returned questionnaires.

75 questionnaires were rejected by the U.S. Postal Department because of inadequate zip codes.

33 questionnaires were not forwarded because students have moved out of state.

55 questionnaires were returned by U.S. Postal Department, stamped "address unknown."

17 additional questionnaires were not delivered because of insufficient addresses.

A total of 510 questionnaires have been accounted for and 560, for reasons unknown, have not been returned.

Male and female responses showing the primary or number one reason why they did not enroll in Continuing Education Classes, Fall Semester, 1967:

M	F	Total	
6	0	6	I entered military service.
10	14	24	The classes I needed were offered at 4:40 p.m., too early for me to attend.
1	1	2	The classes I needed were offered on the wrong evening for my attendance.
17	14	31	The schedule of classes did not offer the courses I wanted.
23	24	47	I have transferred to day classes.
7	3	10	I am enrolled in another college or university.
12	33	45	I have accomplished my educational goal.
11	10	80*	I have moved to another community.

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* Fifty-nine questionnaires were rejected by the postal department because students have moved out of state or had no forwarding address given; therefore they have been included in "moved" category.

M	F	Total	
1	1	2	I failed a course in the spring semester and did not want to return to the university.
20	12	32	My job interfered with taking classes.
3	7	10	Family problems prevented me from continuing my education
11	13	24	I did not have time to study.
4	2	6	Sickness or poor health has forced me to discontinue my education.
6	10	16	I did not have time to study.
0	1	1	I did not have satisfactory transportation to get to the campus.
1	4	5	I withdrew during Spring Semester 1967.
17	21	38	Other reasons.
150	170	375	Total responses - all categories.

Male and female responses showing the secondary or number two reason why they did not enroll in Continuing Education Classes, Fall Semester, 1967:

M	F	Total	
1	0	1	I entered military service.
11	2	13	The classes I needed were offered at 4:40 p.m., too early for me to attend.
3	0	3	The classes I needed were offered on the wrong evening for my attendance.
4	4	8	The schedule of classes did not offer the courses I wanted.
3	0	3	I have transferred to day classes.
7	6	13	My job interfered with taking classes.
1	7	8	Family problems prevented me from continuing my education.
3	5	8	I did not have the money to enroll in the 1967 Fall Semester.
0	3	3	Sickness or poor health has forced me to discontinue my education.
3	4	7	I did not have time to study.

The total number of third ranking reasons for dropping out were not of sufficient quanity to justify reporting.

Findings of the study have revealed five possible areas of significance affecting adult dropouts in the Division of Continuing Education. (1) lack of desired courses, (2) transfer to day classes, (3) accomplishment of educational goals, (4) employment interfering with enrollment, (5) movement from the community. Other factors such as the time classes were offered, transportation, time for study do not seem significant enough to warrant concern.

I. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study are inconclusive because despite the random sampling technique applied to the study, the returns were not sufficient in number to provide a basis for valid conclusions. Allowing for 206 questionnaires which did not reach their destination, it would appear that 864 dropouts did receive their questionnaires. The completed questionnaires returned thus far represent 34% of the total number delivered, or 29% of the original 1,090 dropouts.

It might be concluded that timing for the particular study was not conductive to a good response to mailout type questionnaires, since nearly 7 months has transpired between the dropout period and the follow-up. It is possible that the cover letter did not state clearly its intended purpose. The tone of the communication may not have had sufficient warmth or encouragement to motivate individuals to participate in the study.

The hypotheses appear to be compatible with established theories in adult education, yet the findings suggest that no relationship exists between the concerned variables and that null hypotheses are likely to

be established. The questionnaire seemed to be compatible with the original hypotheses, but perhaps it did not provide effective communication with the students. Student responses to the "other" category in the questionnaire suggest additional hypothesis and reasons for dropping out of continuing education programs.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that further study and investigation is needed with respect to adult dropouts in programs of continuing education. Adult educators have great need to know and understand why adults drop out of programs. Much time and effort is expended to attract and motivate adult students, yet very little is known about the forces or factors contributing to dropout.

It is recommended that additional studies be developed in subsequent semesters and that such studies begin soon after the close of each semester to avoid a time lag which might have bearing on the percentage of responses. All questionnaires, when mailed, should be sent via first class mail to ensure delivery. Different approaches to the dropout problem should be utilized, and the random sample technique applied to personal interivew might produce more useful data. The application of statistical analysis to such data might well place the sutdies within a respectable range of educational research and hence be of value in the field.

WHAT WAS LEARNED DURING THE STUDY

1. Mail-out type questionnaires must be well designed and cover letters demand a most effective communication between the researcher and group being studied.
2. Timing is essential to obtaining the greatest number of returns from respondents.
3. Many adult students were quite slow in returning their questionnaires despite the requested deadline for returns (January 25, 1968). Ninety-four returns were received after the cut off date during a period of three months with the lastest return being postmarked April 20th!
4. Many adult students are mobile. For example, one respondent is now residing in Switzerland. Other responses came form Colorado, Kentucky, Michigan, Texas and several from Vietnam.
5. The U.S. Post Office in Tucson returned 206 questionnaires for the following reasons:

    17 insufficient addresses
    26 addresses unknown
    33 moved out of state - were not forwarded
    55 change of addresses in Tucson - were not forwarded
    75 rejected because of inadequate zip codes

6. Fourteen students had not dropped out of Continuing Education but for some reason they had been identified as dropouts by the computer (shades of technology!)
7. Finally, it appears that the mail-out method of soliciting questionnaires for research purposes is not a satisfactory method despite its potential.

8. The study involved much time and work but it was a worthwhile effort and we in the Division of Continuing Education have gained some insight into the dropout problem. Further studies are needed and we have learned from experience that improved research techniques must be utilized for such studies.

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